



Advocacy for Children with Disabilities

60-B Weston Street Hartford CT, 06120

Judiciary Committee
Testimony in Support of H.B. 6581 and S.B. 1062
March 11, 2013

Dear Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for allowing us to submit testimony on behalf of African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP) in support of legislation to provide review of long adult prison sentences imposed on children and to allow courts to consider youth-related factors in sentencing children transferred to adult court. AFCAMP is a parent-run, family organization in the state of Connecticut that provides education, advocacy and support to parents raising children with disabilities, for the purpose of improving their children's education and quality of life. We serve thousands of low-income families in Hartford, New Haven and throughout the state. We support H.B. 6581 and S.B. 1062.

There is a documented high rate of confluence between children with juvenile justice contact and children with disabilities and mental disorders. AFCAMP endeavors to advocate for important reform in the juvenile justice system in Connecticut. We strongly urge enactment of legislation that would allow juvenile offenders serving lengthy sentences a meaningful opportunity, after service of a portion of the sentence, to obtain release before the end of that term by demonstrating increased maturity and rehabilitation.

That adolescents have underdeveloped brains making them more impulsive than adults, susceptible to peer pressure, and lacking in foresight has been well-established scientifically and recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Graham v. Florida*, 130 S. Ct. 2011 (2010) and *Miller v. Alabama*, 132 S. Ct. 2455 (2012). The implications of this evidence as it concerns juveniles' level of culpability and likelihood of successful rehabilitation has been reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court.

We are very saddened to state that the burden of serving long sentences has fallen disproportionately on minorities: 88% of individuals serving sentences of 10 years or more for crimes committed under age 18 are African American or Hispanic. Questions must be raised about the extreme disproportionate number of minority juveniles serving long sentences.

Last, we wish to point out that the cost of providing juvenile offenders serving long sentences a meaningful opportunity of release would be small. There are less than 300 people serving sentences of more than 10 years for crimes committed under the age of 18. Review would occur after the individual has served a significant period of his or her sentence. Because each person is serving a different sentence, hearings would be staggered and the cost of review would not be significant. Public safety would not be jeopardized because a second look would in no way guarantee release.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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